

# Adjunct Advocate

The news magazine for adjunct college faculty • May/Jun 2001 •

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<http://www.adjunctnation.com/members/newsarchives/advocate/may.00/cover.1.php3>



## Adjunct Advocate

the news magazine for adjunct college faculty

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**Founder/Publisher** P. D. Lesko

**Executive Editor** P. D. Lesko

**Associate Editor** Bob Robinson

**Assistant Editor** Laurie Henry

**Contributing Editors** Pamela Dillon (innocents abroad)  
Evelyn Beck (going the distance)  
Diane Calabrese (reviews)  
Christopher Cumo (ivory tower)  
Richard Lyons (administrator's corner)  
Lee Shainen (unconventional wisdom)

**Staff Writers** Christopher Cumo

Laurie Henry

P. D. Lesko

Bob Robinson

**Contributors** Evelyn Beck, Christopher Cumo,  
Diane Calabrese, Pamela Dillon,  
P. D. Lesko, Richard Lyons,  
Bob Robinson, Lee Shainen

**Circulation Manager** Marjorie Winkelman

**Webmaster** John Cady

**Cover Art** Steve Keister

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Evelyn Beck** is a college English instructor who has been developing and teaching distance education courses for about five years. Contact her at [ebeck@carol.net](mailto:ebeck@carol.net).

**Diane Calabrese** writes reviews regularly for *The Adjunct Advocate*. Contact her at [editor@adjunctadvocate.com](mailto:editor@adjunctadvocate.com).

**Christopher Cumo** is a staff writer for *The Adjunct Advocate*. Contact him at [ccumo@juno.com](mailto:ccumo@juno.com).

**Pamela Dillon** is a free-lance writer who lives in Springboro, Ohio. Contact her at [pamdillon2@aol.com](mailto:pamdillon2@aol.com).

**P.D. Lesko** is the Executive Editor of *The Adjunct Advocate*. Contact her at [editor@adjunctadvocate.com](mailto:editor@adjunctadvocate.com).

**Richard Lyons** is the author of *The Adjunct Professor's Guide to Success*. Contact him at [rlyons@ircc.cc.fl.us](mailto:rlyons@ircc.cc.fl.us).

**Bob Robinson** is the Associate Editor of *The Adjunct Advocate*. Contact him at [rr@adjunctadvocate.com](mailto:rr@adjunctadvocate.com).

**Lee Shainen** is a contributing editor who lives, and teaches part-time, in Arizona. Contact him at [LSHAINEN@pimacc.pima.edu](mailto:LSHAINEN@pimacc.pima.edu).



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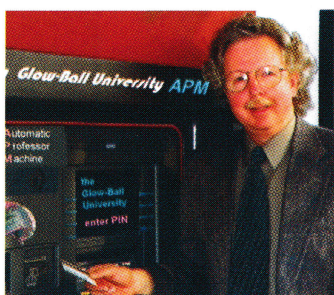
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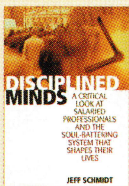
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## Disciplined Minds Author Seeks Reinstatement

**DESPITE 19 YEARS** of widely praised work as staff editor at *Physics Today* magazine, controversial author Dr. Jeff Schmidt was fired last May. The official reason? His statement that he wrote his book, *Disciplined Minds*, at least in part, “at the office.”

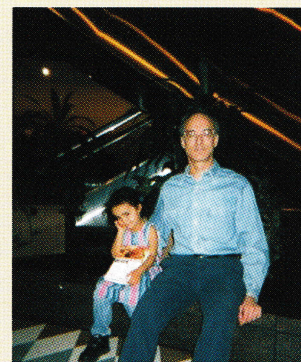
According to Schmidt, however, his bosses had disliked his outspoken views ever since he had questioned company policies at a retreat in 1997. A few days after reading the provocative opening sentences in Schmidt’s book, magazine executives escorted him to the human-resources office, had someone gather his personal items, and told him never to return.

Schmidt’s book, *Disciplined Minds: A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the Soul-Battering System that Shapes Their Lives* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), is a radical and disturbing look at the lives of today’s 21 million professionals (see *Adjunct Advocate*, Mar/Apr 2001, page 32).

Profits from the book, however, have not eased his financial plight.

“I understand the book is doing quite well,” Schmidt said, but added that he never expected royalties to be a significant source of income. Officials at Rowman & Littlefield said *Disciplined Minds* has “broad national distribution” and may soon appear in paperback. According to Mary Sestric at Rowman & Littlefield, 1,800 cop-

“Those who need the protection of tenure don’t get it,” he said, “and those who get it don’t need it, because they have nothing provocative to say.”



Jeff Schmidt and daughter Joshua Rose

ies have been sold since April 2000.

Since his dismissal, life for Schmidt has not been easy. His former employer tried to deny him unemployment compensation, forcing him to take his case to the Maryland Department of Labor. There, a hearing determined that *Physics Today* had fired Schmidt without evidence that his writing had interfered with his work for the magazine, and awarded him benefits.

He is asking for his job back, but so far *Physics Today* officials have been unsympathetic to his plea. Sixteen former *Physics Today* staff members have written a letter to the publisher protesting his firing. In addition, Noam Chomsky, distinguished linguist and social critic at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, helped solicit more than 130 signatures on a protest letter. Schmidt has created a Web Site at [disciplined-minds.com](http://disciplined-minds.com), where people of conscience can rise to his defense.

Schmidt, who holds a Ph.D. in

physics from the University of California, Irvine, has said he might look for adjunct work at the University of the District of Columbia, near his home. However, he has no illusions about academe. Search committees screen applicants, he believes, so that only the most intellectually and politically timid gain entrance to the academy. This is especially true of adjuncts, whose marginalization, according to Schmidt, is a form of ideological coercion.

Schmidt knows that a nonconformist remark in the faculty lounge can cost an adjunct his job.

“Those who need the protection of tenure don’t get it,” he said, “and those who get it don’t need it, because they have nothing provocative to say.”

If *Physics Today* doesn’t respond to the growing public pressure, then Schmidt may supplement it with legal action with help from Dickstein Shapiro, one of Washington’s largest law firms. ✍